

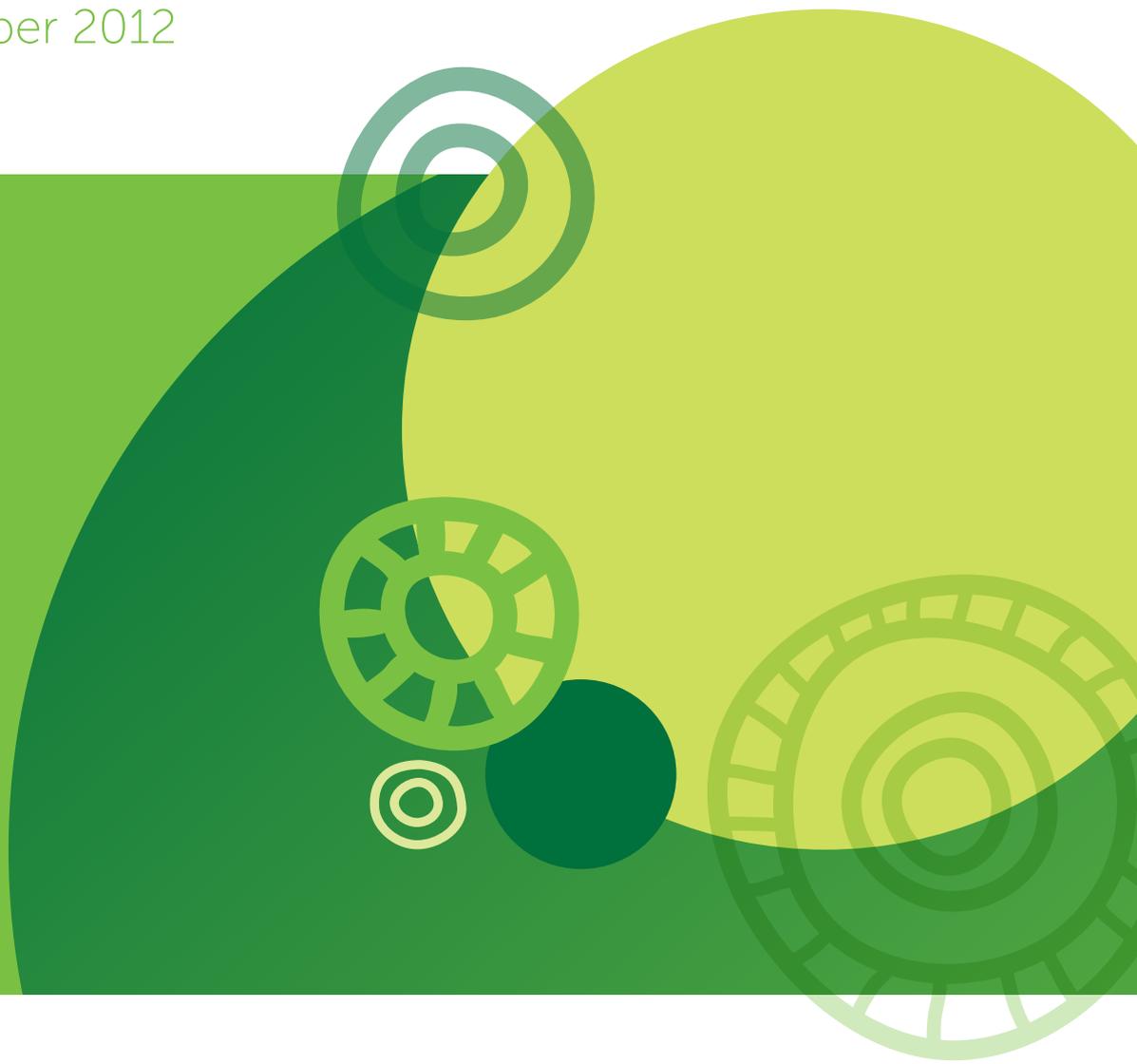


Australian Government

**Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**

Family Support Program
Future Directions
Discussion Paper

October 2012



a strong and fair society for *all Australians*

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The document must be attributed as the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Family Support Program Future Directions Discussion Paper.

Phone: 1300 653 227

Email: fahcsiafeedback@fahcsia.gov.au

Post: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Tuggeranong Office Park
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Canberra Business Centre ACT 2610

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Message from the Minister

The last 50 years have seen major social and economic changes. While the majority of Australian families have benefited from the nation's growing prosperity, some families still experience long-term welfare dependency and social exclusion.

To support those families, the Australian Government is delivering a welfare reform agenda shaped by three imperatives:

1. Every child should have the best start in life through being safe and nurtured.
2. All children and young people should be engaged with education or training.
3. Every available option should be used to support more Australians into work.

The Australian Government's Family Support Program (FSP) makes an important contribution to this agenda. It funds non-government organisations to deliver services that strengthen family wellbeing and community cohesion, protect the best interests of children, close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage, and build parents' capacity to participate in work. More than \$1 billion (2011-2014) is invested in over 350 organisations to deliver these services across Australia.

Although organisations work hard to respond to families' increasingly complex needs, some families find it difficult to access services when they need support. Working together to achieve more integrated planning and funding of services in disadvantaged locations would reduce complexity in the service system and strengthen existing service infrastructure. Increasing the focus on collaboration and evidence in the design and implementation of services would also strengthen the system of support available for vulnerable families.

The Attorney-General has commissioned research on programs delivered under the Family Law Services stream of the FSP. This research will include a process of consultation with the FSP sector and other stakeholders, and form the basis for a review of these family law services.

This paper provides a starting point for discussion between the Australian Government and the sector about the future directions of the Families and Children's Services stream of the FSP. You are invited to 'have your say' through written submissions. Early next year, there will be a series of consultations about the opportunities you have identified to strengthen the FSP into the future. I look forward to participating in as many of these discussions as possible.

FSP funding agreements will remain in place until 30 June 2014. Any changes to the program resulting from your written submissions and consultations will be signalled to the community sector by mid-2013.

I encourage you to contribute to this important process to ensure the FSP continues to be valued as an important national program of support for families and children.



The Hon Julie Collins MP
Minister for Community Services

15 October 2012



1. What is the Family Support Program?

The Australian Government's Family Support Program (FSP) is structured under three broad streams:

Family and Children's Services

- *Communities for Children Services* deliver place-based prevention and early intervention services.
- *Family and Relationship Services* deliver counselling services for adults and children, as well as broader parenting education and support.
- *Specialist Services* provide counselling and group programs for families affected by substance abuse, violence and trauma.
- *Community Playgroups* provide support in establishing self-managed playgroups that promote positive child development, parent and child interactions, and social support for parents.

Family Law Services

- *Family Relationship Centres* assist families to address relationship difficulties, and achieve parenting and care arrangements in the best interests of children through information, advice and dispute resolution.
- *Family Dispute Resolution* and *Regional Family Dispute Resolution* services assist families to resolve disputes relating to separation and divorce, and improve their post-separation relationships and care arrangements.
- *Post Separation Co-operative Parenting* services deliver programs designed to shift the focus from the conflict between parents to the needs of children in relation to their parenting and care.
- *Supporting Children after Separation* services deliver programs that support children to maintain and enhance family relationships during and post their parents' separation.
- *Parenting Orders Program* services assist separating or separated parents experiencing significant conflict to better manage the parenting and care of their children.
- *Children's Contact Services* provide an environment and support that enable separated parents to have safe contact with their children and strengthen their relationships.
- *Family Law Counselling* provides counselling and support to families during and post separation.

National Services

- *Family Relationship Advice Line* provides information, advice and referrals to assist people experiencing family relationship or separation issues.
- *Family Relationships Online* delivers information about family relationship and parenting services available across Australia.
- *Mensline* provides short-term telephone and online counselling services for men and their families experiencing relationship difficulties.
- *Raising Children Network* provides information for parents and carers of children from birth to 15 years of age, and research for providers of family and parenting services.
- *Find and Connect Support Services* assist Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants trace their records and identities, access professional counselling services and restore their relationships with family, where possible and desired.



2. Why does the Government invest in the Family Support Program?

The Australian Government delivers universal support and services to help families raise their children, along with a range of targeted early intervention services for families and children.

The foundation of this support is the provision of income and family support payments to provide both a broad social safety net and specifically support families in their parenting role. This support includes pensions, family payments, Child Care Benefit and tax rebates. The Government also provides a range of services for all Australian families such as Medicare, employment services, child and parenting support services, family relationship services and the family law system. In addition, the Australian Government provides funding for key services delivered through states and territories such as hospitals, schools, housing and disability services.

Through the FSP, non-government organisations deliver universal and targeted services that promote the wellbeing and the participation of children and families, especially those who are vulnerable and those who are living in disadvantaged locations.

The Australian Government streamlined a number of children and family services funded through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Attorney-General's Department, and launched the new FSP on 1 July 2011.

During the first year of the new FSP, over 350 organisations assisted more than 800,000 people from 2,300 sites across Australia.

The 'best interests of children' is the fundamental principle that underpins all FSP services and reflects the Australian Government's commitment and responsibilities as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Therefore, FSP services:

- target vulnerable and disadvantaged families, through a more holistic understanding of the nature of disadvantage and its impacts;
- support children's social, emotional and cognitive development, as a pathway to lifelong learning and wellbeing;
- deliver prevention, early intervention and secondary services, to support the safety and wellbeing of children;
- provide support to parents, through counselling and parenting skills training;
- promote the job-readiness of families, stabilising the home environment and improving their engagement with school, training and work; and
- deliver family dispute resolution and other specialist services for separated families and/or families experiencing high conflict, to achieve the co-operative care of children.

The new FSP has improved coordination between services through its guidelines for collaboration, increased the number of targeted services for vulnerable families living in disadvantaged communities, and has provided greater flexibility to services in how their activities are delivered to meet the needs of their communities.

A number of additional initiatives were funded during 2011 as part of the new FSP to strengthen its focus to support the Australian Government's key social policy agendas. These initiatives included:

- expanding Communities for Children-Facilitating Partner (CfC FP), CfC Direct and CfC Indigenous Parenting services;
- introducing the requirement for service providers to develop Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Client Access Strategies, Indigenous Access Plans and Indigenous Engagement Targets;
- investing in Intensive Family Support Services (IFSS) in the Northern Territory and Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands;
- implementing Find and Connect Support Services nationally for Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants;
- increasing the investment in seven CfC FP sites and establishing three new CfC FP sites to support the objectives of the Government's *Building Australia's Future Workforce* (BAFW) trials;
- a ten year commitment through the Child, Youth, Family and Community Wellbeing package under *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory*, expanding the program over time by 15 new CfCs; and
- new funding for the longitudinal study of *Stronger Families in Australia* and independent evaluations of the MyTime for Grandparents program, the BAFW program and the Protective Behaviours pilot program.

These new initiatives brought the Australian Government's investment in the FSP to over \$1 billion for the 2011-14 period. During 2012, the Government announced further funding of around \$3 billion to pay its share of the Social and Community Services Sector (SACS) supplementation to organisations delivering programs on behalf of the Commonwealth. This included FSP organisations to ensure a full transition to the new modern award for social and community services workers.

Despite the impacts of the global financial crisis, the Australian Government has invested significant new funding into the FSP to improve the services available to meet the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged families. The SACS supplementation and the investments in FSP services under *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory* will strengthen FSP servicing in the future. This is in addition to other Government priorities for funding for services which support children and families, including the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the National Dental Health package, schools and education funding, and enhanced mental health services.



The Australian Government's key social policy reform agendas will continue to shape the direction of the program, including a commitment to:

- achieve the safety and wellbeing of Australian children, through the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* and the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*;
- support vulnerable and disadvantaged families and children to participate and achieve economic independence, through the *Social Inclusion Agenda* and *Building Australia's Future Workforce* trials;
- encourage mutual obligation to ensure parents meet their responsibilities to their children, through the *Welfare Reform Agenda*; and
- improve outcomes and opportunities for Indigenous children and their families, through the *Closing the Gap* and *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory* initiatives.

The Government will continue to look to the FSP to play a significant role in making a difference in the lives of vulnerable children and families. It will do this by increasing the focus on providing targeted services for those experiencing entrenched disadvantage and achieving the goal shared by all governments and the sector for a more integrated family support service system where families truly experience *no wrong door*.



3. Who does the Family Support Program support?

The Australian Government is committed to focusing its payments and programs of support to those families most in need.

The FSP currently funds over 350 non-government organisations to deliver services from approximately 2,300 sites across Australia. Of these, 52 locations are supported through a CfC FP place-based program, which promotes collaboration and distributes brokerage funds to fill local service gaps through community partner organisations.

A large proportion of the activities funded under the FSP are universal or 'soft entry' community engagement activities. This enables the FSP to achieve significant geographical coverage through its funding and allows all families in a community to engage with supportive activities that improve community cohesion, social support networks and family wellbeing.

Research confirms however that those most in need of support tend to be the families who are the least likely to access support. These families often have multiple and complex needs. Such families include those on income support, young parent families, Indigenous families, families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, sole parent families, families with disability, families experiencing problems with housing, domestic and family violence, substance abuse and mental health, and families where children are at risk of neglect and abuse.¹

For these highly vulnerable families, an intensive and long-term program of intervention is likely to be required to help them achieve their full potential, and the FSP must ensure its services provide *the right door* for those who need this more intensive support from the program.

The most vulnerable families are the most difficult to engage, and the most disadvantaged by a fragmented service system. These families often make the least use of services during the early childhood years. This can be because they lack the skills and confidence to negotiate the system, they are unfamiliar with the culture and language, they are isolated and lack the social networks that would help them find and use the services that are available, or because they have multiple problems and need help from many sources.²

As part of the Australian Government's commitment to improving outcomes for vulnerable families, service providers were asked to develop and implement a Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Client Access Strategy (VADCAS) under the new FSP. These strategies include a focus on collaboration, improving service accessibility and responsiveness, and ensuring that services reflect the needs of their local communities. The VADCAS includes the design of Indigenous Access Plans based on *Closing the Gap* engagement principles, and identify Indigenous Engagement Targets that demonstrate providers' increased levels of outreach and support for local Indigenous families over time.

¹ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Growing Up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children: 2009–10 Annual Report*, FaHCSIA, Canberra, 2011, viewed 1 July 2012, <www.fahcsia.gov.au>.

² Tim Moore, *Place-based approaches to supporting children and families*, Centre for Community Child Health, The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, 2012, viewed 9 July 2012, <www.rch.org.au>.

An analysis of FSP organisations' VADCAS' identified many examples of innovative collaboration and outreach activities. These examples will be shared through a good practice guide – *Good and innovative practice in service delivery to vulnerable and disadvantaged families and children* – that will be published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in October 2012. This guide will support FSP organisations in their ongoing development of partnerships and outreach to improve servicing for the most vulnerable families in their communities.

Additionally, Intensive Family Support Services (IFSS) have been established in 16 locations in the Northern Territory and Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in the last year.³ IFSS will expand to 15 additional communities in the Northern Territory as part of the implementation of *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory* from 2013.

IFSS provides intensive homemaker services to families where children are highly vulnerable to neglect, and where child protection authorities have referred families for income management. The program relies on strong partnerships – formalised through Memoranda of Understanding between the Australian Government, Northern Territory Government, service providers and an implementation partner – to join with the family and their community and share responsibility for protecting children.

In the future, FSP organisations will continue to be expected to actively engage vulnerable families through their service design and outreach, and provide intensive services that improve the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children and families. FSP organisations will also need to evidence a culture that respects families' rights and influence in service delivery, builds on the strengths in families and communities, and achieves collaborative partnerships, especially with Indigenous-led organisations, as the basis for engaging the most vulnerable families in pathways out of disadvantage and welfare dependency.

Consultation Questions:

- 3.1 What changes to the current placement and design of FSP services would ensure access to the range of services needed by vulnerable children and families?
- 3.2 How could more intensive support be provided to address the level of risk and disadvantage experienced by some children and families, within existing funding?
- 3.3 What improvements could strengthen the design of the Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Client Access Strategy (VADCAS) and its influence on organisational culture and service delivery?
- 3.4 In addition to the VADCAS, what would help ensure all FSP organisations are reaching and responding effectively to the needs of vulnerable children and families, including Indigenous children and families?

³ Locations of IFSS: Darwin urban areas (suburbs), Darwin Aboriginal Communities, Palmerston Township (including urban and rural areas); Gurdorcka (Palmerston Aboriginal Community), Wadeye, Katherine, Barunga, Mataranka, Alice Springs (two sites), Finke, Imanpa, Mutitjulu; Kaltukatjara / Docker River and Tennant Creek.

4. Where are Family Support Program services available to families?

The Australian Government recognises the strong evidence about the importance of place as a platform for family support service delivery and system reform.

In Australia, disadvantage is highly concentrated. Just over 1.7 per cent of Australian communities account for seven times their share of the main factors that entrench disadvantage.⁴

Disadvantage often starts early and accumulates over time. Highly disadvantaged locations share many characteristics, including high levels of criminal convictions or incarceration, low family incomes, and high levels of long-term unemployment and child protection substantiations. These locations also show increased rates of disability, poor physical and mental health, higher numbers of early school leavers and low levels of Year 12 completion, and limited access to technology such as the Internet.⁵

Place and social support has a significant impact on child and family wellbeing.

When social disadvantage becomes entrenched within a limited number of localities, a disabling social climate can develop that is more than the sum of individual and household disadvantages and the prospect is increased disadvantage being passed from one generation to the next.⁶

As part of the Australian Government's commitment to improving outcomes for children and families living in disadvantaged communities, the FSP funds CfC FP services in 52 targeted communities.

CfC FP services take a place-based approach to tackling disadvantage. They address issues that exist at the neighbourhood level, such as social isolation, fragmented service provision and limited economic opportunities. They drive collaboration across the service system and, through their brokerage funds, address gaps in services prioritised by their local community.

CfC FP services particularly focus on building stability within the family and the positive engagement of children with early childhood services and schooling. Such foundational support is a critical enabler to parents participating in training and work for the long-term wellbeing and economic independence of their families.

In 2011, place-based trials to support teenage parents and jobless families in ten locations of disadvantage commenced as part of the Australian Government's *Building Australia's Future Workforce* participation agenda. Seven existing and three new CfC FP organisations have been funded to support disadvantaged families to overcome the multiple barriers they face, working with them to develop and maximise opportunities to engage with education and employment. In addition, all 52 CfC FPs received additional funding to increase support and work readiness for parents of young children receiving Parenting Payments.

⁴ T Vinson, T, M Rawsthorne & B Cooper, *Dropping off the Edge: The distribution of disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia, Richmond, Victoria, 2007.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*

The Child, Youth, Family and Community Wellbeing package under *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory* will also take a place-based approach to building the safety and wellbeing of children and young people living in remote Northern Territory communities.

Fifteen new CfCs in the Northern Territory will:

- use local data and community leaders to set priorities, focus resources and drive change;
- implement services in stages to match the readiness of communities to lead and drive improvements for their people;
- enhance the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander non-government organisations to provide the governance and brokerage of services to support the community;
- ensure services are well planned and organised, and are highly responsive to the practical safety and wellbeing needs of the community;
- implement programs that have been well researched and proven to be effective;
- build the skills of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to become the providers of services that support and strengthen their community; and
- shift power to the local community to own the responsibility for children's safety and wellbeing, families' participation in education and work and deliver the solutions to community problems.

Not all Family and Children's services under the FSP are place-based. Community Playgroups and almost 200 CfC Direct services delivered under the FSP are not prioritised through local community planning processes for funding. In addition, not all CfC FP organisations give genuine agency to community members in the planning and funding of local services, or the opportunity to co-design services to meet their needs.

Consultation Questions:

- 4.1 To ensure the FSP's focus on supporting vulnerable children and families, especially those living in disadvantaged communities, should a larger proportion of FSP funding (under the Family and Children's Services stream) be delivered through a place-based community-led governance model such as CfC FP?
- 4.2 If the responsibilities of CfC FPs were broadened, are there improvements required in the design, processes, support for and accountabilities of CfC FPs?
- 4.3 How well does the current CfC FP model enable collaboration and the integration of services delivered by community partners?
- 4.4 How well is the capacity and capability of community partners strengthened through CfC FPs?
- 4.5 Should CfC FPs only be funded in areas of high disadvantage and where existing service infrastructure is inadequate to meet local needs?

5. How well does the Family Support Program provide a service response for vulnerable families?

Research confirms that a comprehensive family support service framework demonstrates the following key elements:

- universal – the provision of a core set of services to all families in all localities;
- tiered – the provision of additional supports to families and areas identified as having additional needs and/or being exposed to multiple risks;
- multi-level – able to address all factors that directly or indirectly shape the development of young children and the functioning of their families;
- place-based – integrated services planned and delivered in socio-geographic areas;
- partnership-based – based on partnerships between families and service providers, between service providers, and between governments and service providers;
- governance structure – has a robust governance structure that allows different levels of government, different government departments, non-government services and communities to collaborate in developing and implementing comprehensive place-based action plans; and
- evidence-based – services that support the goals of government and the community, are evidence-based and effective in addressing disadvantage, and where evaluation is in place and the workforce is skilled to deliver.⁷

The Australian Government, state and territory governments, local governments and service providers jointly hold the levers to build a service system capable of responding comprehensively to the increasingly complex needs of vulnerable families and communities.

The Council of Australian Governments' *Family Support Services National Collaboration Framework* envisages a level of cooperation between governments that will deliver a more efficient and effective alignment of Australian and state and territory government investments in services.⁸

The formal partnerships agreed between the Australian and state and territory governments to deliver a comprehensive suite of services for Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants are an early example of successful collaboration in investment and implementation.

⁷ Tim Moore, *The impact of neighbourhood physical and social environments on child and family well-being*, Centre for Community Child Health, The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, 2012, viewed 9 July 2012, <www.rch.org.au>.

⁸ The Family Support Services National Collaboration Framework is available at www.csmac.gov.au.

The formal partnerships struck between the Australian and Northern Territory Governments, service providers and the program implementation partner in the delivery of the FSP's Intensive Family Support Services also shows promise for the design and delivery of a comprehensive and integrated program of care for children at risk and their families.

As the program evolves, all FSP providers and the Department must actively work together to achieve a comprehensive and joined family support system that is configured to meet the changing needs of vulnerable families and disadvantaged communities, and is accountable for its impact.

Consultation Questions:

- 5.1 What would it take to create a better alignment of effort and investment in family support services in a community?
- 5.2 What changes are needed within the family support sector to ensure a more comprehensive system of family support is achieved in locations of disadvantage?
- 5.3 What needs to change in the relationship and engagement between governments, the Department, the sector and the community to achieve a comprehensive family support system in locations of disadvantage?
- 5.4 What steps are needed to reduce 'competition' for resources and strengthen collaboration between services to minimise duplication, service gaps and inefficiencies for service providers and governments and maximise outcomes for families?



6. How does the Family Support Program use evidence to improve service delivery?

The Australian Government values evidence-based advice for change. It needs to know what is effective and what will change outcomes for families. It needs to know that measurement and evaluation is in place, and that programs can respond and adapt to new evidence and the Australian Government's priorities flexibly and reasonably quickly.

Many FSP activities are independently evaluated by the Department and/or by organisations and their academic partners. The longitudinal *Stronger Families in Australia* study, the evaluations of the Protective Behaviours Pilot, MyTime for Grandparents, Find and Connect, IFSS and BAFW, the FSP Partner Survey, and the analysis of the VADCAS, are all examples of FSP research and analysis which focus on identifying the strengths and opportunities for improvement in the delivery of the program.

The 2011 funding agreements and the FSP's outcomes-based performance framework aimed to increase flexibility for organisations to design their services to meet the needs of local families, while generating evidence about the reach, depth, take-up and impact of the FSP and its funded activities. The majority of FSP organisations confirm their support for demonstrating the outcomes achieved through their services and for building evidence about program fidelity.

However, the Department has received feedback that FSP funding agreements do not express the objectives of the program clearly enough. It has also received feedback that some providers consider FSP's performance reporting requirements can constrain their ability to perform their core role of service provision. Finding the right regulatory balance will help assure organisations and the Department that the objectives of reporting outcomes and building evidence to strengthen the FSP and inform policy are being achieved without jeopardising front-line service delivery.

Maintaining flexibility to ensure families can access the most appropriate mix of services to meet their needs is important. Formalising the expectation for organisations to deliver evidence-informed and effective programs that improve social inclusion and economic participation outcomes for families is also important. These are key areas for improvement in the drafting of FSP funding agreements in the future.

Improving the design of the FSP performance framework and the consistent collection of data across all the activities delivered through the FSP are also key areas for improvement, requiring joint effort between the Department and service providers.

Such structural improvements should ensure a clear vision for the FSP, shared strategic directions between the Government and the sector, and defined roles, responsibilities and clear accountabilities for the Department and the sector. These improvements will enable a stronger partnership-based relationship between the Department and the sector in delivering family support.

Consultation Questions:

- 6.1 How can the Government maximise flexibility and minimise red tape for FSP funded organisations, but be assured that vulnerable families are being supported through high quality services that make a difference to their life outcomes?
- 6.2 What is the best way to capture data and information for evaluation and learning, and share this across the FSP nationally?
- 6.3 Should the FSP play a stronger role in building evidence, driving innovation in the design and delivery of family support, and require all its funded activities to be implemented from a strong evidence base? If so, how could this be achieved?



7. Have your say

Submissions

You are invited to forward a written submission responding to the issues raised in this paper. Submissions can be sent to the following email address:

FSPfuturedirections@fahcsia.gov.au

Alternatively, you can post your submission to:

Family Support Program Branch – Future Directions
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
TOP AE3
PO Box 7576
Canberra Business Centre ACT 2610

Written submissions should be received by no later than close of business
Monday 19 November 2012.

Format for submissions

Electronic submissions should be in Word format.

Publication

The Department will review all submissions and post key themes raised in the responses on the Department's website at **www.fahcsia.gov.au/FSPfuturedirections**.

The Department may also publish some submissions in full for public review on its website and may include submissions in other reports or materials published by the Department.

Consultations

There will be a round of consultations on the issues raised in this paper, and the key themes identified in written submissions, early in 2013.

Further details on the timing and location of these consultations will be posted on the Department's website at **www.fahcsia.gov.au/FSPfuturedirections**.

Your participation in the consultations is strongly encouraged to help inform the future directions of the FSP.

The Minister will also post regular updates regarding the future directions of the FSP at **www.fahcsia.gov.au/FSPfuturedirections**.



